

Public Health

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**Swedish National Board of Health
Socialstyrelsen**

Continued decline for smoking as snus consumption increases

Smoking is continuing to decline among both men and women, with 15.0 per cent of men and 17.5 per cent of women aged 16-84 smoking in 2004. This represents a decrease compared with the previous year (see table 6). There are however still major variations between different population groups. The lowest figure is found among farmers and senior white-collar workers, with less than 10 per cent smokers. The percentage figure for smokers is also relatively low in the 16-24 age group, with just under 11 per cent of men and just over 14 per cent of women. The highest figure for smokers, 32 per cent, is found among people who have taken early retirement or receive disability pensions, as well as the long-term unemployed. Smoking figures are also high among single women with children and men born outside Sweden (29.4% and 26.6% respectively).

Table 6. Percentage figure for smokers compared with 2002-2003 in different population groups aged 16-84 in Sweden.

Population group	2002-2003, men	2004, men	2002-2003, women	2004, women
All people aged 16-84	16.5	15.0	18.8	17.5
16-24 age group	10.4	10.6	17.0	14.3
25-34 age group	13.0	12.4	16.2	17.1
35-44 age group	15.7	12.3	22.1	18.3
45-54 age group	23.7	23.8	24.0	24.7
Early retirement and disability pension/long-term unemployed	37.9	33.6	29.5	31.8
Single people with children	23.0	...	34.9	29.4
People born outside Sweden	30.8	26.6	21.4	20.6
Unskilled workers	23.7	22.1	24.2	23.2
Senior white-collar workers	9.4	8.3	11.0	8.7

... = figure too uncertain to report

Source: ULF (Living Conditions Survey), Statistics Sweden.

The percentage of the population aged 16-84 among whom snus is used on a daily basis has risen from 10.3 to 13.0 per cent between 1996/97 and 2004. Just over 23 per cent of men and just under 3 per cent of women use snus. It is far more common for people born in Sweden, men aged 25-44, unskilled workers and single men with children to use snus than for people born outside Sweden or higher-level white-collar workers to do so. During 2005, there was also a debate about whether snus is a smoke cessation aid or whether it paves the way towards smoking. Everyone agrees that the health hazards of snus are minor compared with those of smoking. During 2005, a number of Swedish studies have been published showing that snus does not increase the risks of myocardial infarction morbidity (28, 29). On the other hand, a compilation of

the scientific literature from the Karolinska Institute demonstrates that snus may increase the risk of pancreas cancer and cause injury to unborn and newborn babies (30). The scientific source material is not always strong, but the assumption should always be that snus is not harmless. When it comes to smoking and using snus, it is therefore always preferable not to do either. The question of what advice we should be giving to those who are unable to quit smoking in any other way remains, however, unanswered. Should they try to switch to snus instead of smoking? By using panel data from Statistics Sweden's Living Conditions Surveys, in which the same people were interviewed in 1988-89 and 1996-97, we have demonstrated that for every person who progressed from snus to smoking, there were some four who switched from smoking to snus. Evidently, many people have used snus as a means to give up smoking. The risk that young adults (aged 16-44) will progress from snus to smoking is also far smaller than the risk that a non-smoker will take up smoking.

The fact that almost 85 per cent of the Swedish population does not smoke is extremely positive and probably brings Sweden closer to the target of having a smoke-free generation than any other country in the world. For the 15 per cent who still smoke, however, the risks remain as high as ever.

Until the statistics on smoking habits for 2005 become available, it will not be possible to discern the effects of the smoking ban in restaurants and other catering facilities that was introduced in 2004. The experience of other countries with regard to introducing smoking bans appears to be extremely positive, and both acceptance levels among the general public and compliance with the ban also appear to be excellent in Sweden. This should have a positive effect on Sweden's smoking habits.